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ABSTRACT

In order to give the psychological conception of alienation greater cogency relative to the influence of sociological alienation, research is needed that ties alienation attitudes to individual personal behavior. It was hypothesized that the stronger the alienation attitudes of people, the weaker will be their exploratory behavior. Thus, alienation attitudes (vegetativeness, nihilism, powerlessness, and adventurousness) are maladaptive because they interfere with simple curiosity about unfamiliar environments. To test this hypothesis, subjects were observed while waiting in an unfamiliar room furnished as an office: they then completed a questionnaire yielding measures of alienation attitudes. Analysis of the data showed that alienation attitudes inhibited exploration of the room, even after intelligence, neuroticism, age, sex, and extraversion-introversion were controlled. Findings suggest that alienation attitudes appear to represent a human handicap, since exploration is necessary not only for development but also for survival. (Author/CS)

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Alienation Attitudes and Exploratory Behavior[1]

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The concept of alienation has certainly had its greatest influence in sociology, where it refers to the structural relationship between persons and their social system whereby they are rendered peripheral to it. In this context, a person may be uneducated, poor, a minority member, or a mere salaried worker and be alienated in a structural sense. The psychological implications of the alienation concept have not attracted as much attention. Psychologically, persons are alienated if they feel or act estranged, regardless of whether their relationship with the social system justifies such feelings and actions.

It is odd that psychological approaches to alienation have been less influential given that they are as old and as theoretically developed as those in the sociological tradition. After all, existential philosophy and psychology have emphasized meaninglessness and powerlessness (Schacht, 1970), and Fromm's (1947) psychoanalytic perspective explicitly considers various forms of alienation, including estrangement from self. This lesser influence is doubly odd when one realizes that most attempts to measure alienation

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employed by sociologists have been psychological, involving questionnaire and interview indexes of attitudes of estrangement.

Very likely, the psychological implications of alienation are not at the forefront because they involve viewing person variables as causes of behavior, and it is just more difficult to believe in such positions. In sociology, emphasis on social causes is built into the discipline, so it is not surprising to find person causes overlooked. But in psychology, one might expect person causes to be in the ascendancy, or at least not de-emphasized. Given this, the perennial upsurgence of radical behaviorism, and even the recent ascendancy of social psychology through the person-situation debate, indicate just how hard it is to consider explanations involving person causes to be cogent.

Even when alienation research has relied upon attitude (or psychological) measurement, the emphasis has been upon social system considerations. Thus, there are studies of alienation attitudes and demographic characteristics (such as socioeconomic status and age), epidemiological categories (such as alcoholism and criminality), and social participation variables (such as voting).

What is needed in order to give psychological conceptualizations of alienation greater cogency is research that ties alienation attitudes to more microscopic, individual, personal behaviors. By charting a nomological network of such behaviors for alienation attitudes, a picture can be gained of the psychological significance of this characteristic. Needless to say, individual differences theorizing and a correlational methodology will be indispensable in this enterprise.

Intrinsic Motivation and Alienation

Intrinsically-motivated behaviors are an obvious choice for demonstrating the relevance of alienation attitudes to microscopic, individual, personal activities. Intrinsically-motivated behaviors involve an interaction between the person and the environment which is characterized by involvement, curiosity, absorbtion, loss of self-consciousness, activeness, and feelings of challenge and satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; White, 1959). Extrinsic pressures and rewards serve to inhibit this self-contained activity (see DeCharms & Muir, 1978).

Alienation attitudes, though person variables, should also inhibit intrinsically-motivated behaviors. To appreciate this, we must focus more on these attitudes. According to Maddi and Kobasa (1980), attitudes of alienation comprise vegetativeness, nihilism, powerlessness and adventurousness. Defined as the inability to believe in the truth, importance or interest value of anything one is doing, vegetativeness bears similarity to meaninglessness as described by Seeman (1975). Nihilism refers to the attempt to discredit everything that appears to have conventional meaning, and its implication of separation from community identifies it as close to the social isolation emphasized by Seeman (1975). In powerlessness, the person still believes in the importance of certain goals, but feels impotent to bring them about (Seeman, 1975). Finally, adventurousness is the interest in extreme and dangerous activities because everyday experiences have lost their meaning and appear boring. In its implication or risk-taking and deviancy, adventurousness is similar to what has been called normlessness (Seeman, 1975). The position taken here is that persons approaching environmental interaction with

pre-existing attitudes of vegetativeness, nihilism, powerlessness or adventurousness should be rather incapable of the characteristics of intrinsically-motivated behavior mentioned earlier.

Intrinsic Motivation Expressed in Exploratory Behavior

In the research presented here (Maddi, Hoover & Kobasa, 1980), exploratory behavior is used as an expression of intrinsically-motivated activity. The purest form of exploratory behavior is simple curiosity about unfamiliar environments, when the subject has no obvious instrumental reason to need information. The environment should be relatively free of extrinsic rewards or punishments. We hypothesized that in such a "neutral" environment, the stronger the alienation attitudes of persons, the weaker will be their exploratory behavior.

Method

Procedure

On arrival, the subject was seated in an office and asked to wait for 10 minutes, as the testing procedure was running late. This period was actually for indexing exploratory behavior, which was accomplished by videotaping the first 8 minutes. The taping equipment was positioned in the next room and the picture was made through a one-way vision screen disguised as a built-in mirror over a functional sink. Ordinary light levels were used to further minimize awareness of being observed. At the end of 10 minutes, the experimenter reentered the office and took the subject to another room where the questionnaires relevant to the study were administered.

After the questionnaires, an interview was conducted to determine whether the subterfuge had been successful, and for debriefing. One subject, who

somewhat suspected the waiting period was excluded from the sample. The remaining 29 subjects included females and males, ranging in age from 18 to 38.

Alienation measure

Administered was the Alienation Test of Maddi, Kobasa and Hoover (1979), which comprises 60 rating items, yielding scores on Powerlessness, Vegetativeness, Nihilism and Adventurousness. Developed through intuitive and internal strategies in several studies, the scales of this test show internal consistency (Coefficient Alpha) from .72 to .95 with a mean of .84, and stability from .59 to .78 with a mean of .64. In the past, the scales have intercorrelated in the moderate to high range, but have shown promise of discriminant as well as convergent validity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Kobasa, 1979; Maddi, et al., 1979).

Control variables

It is possible that intelligence, psychopathology or gregariousness may be important determinants of exploratory behavior, along with or rather than alienation. Hence, the Immediate Test (Corsini, 1951), and the Eysenck Personality Inventory (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1964) were included for control purposes.

Measure of exploratory behavior

The room for the mock waiting period was approximately 15 ft. by 12 ft., with a sink and disguised one-way vision screen on one of the short ends and a window on the other. Also in the room were a desk, two straight chairs, an easy chair, a coffee table, bookshelves and a filing cabinet. Letters, articles and magazines were on the desk, books on the bookshelves, art posters on the coffee table, and a piece of equipment with relays and moveable parts on the

window sill. Several of the desk drawers were partially open. An attempt was made to suggest that the room functioned as the office of someone busily at work in psychology.

Various behavioral options were available to subjects during the waiting period. They could sit quietly, reading, fantasizing or sleeping. Or they could explore the room by looking around, walking, or manipulating objects. It is these three activities that constituted measures of exploratory behavior.

The videotape for each subject was scored for (1) number of objects contacted (Objects), (2) distance locomoted (Distance), and (3) amount of head rotation (Rotation). The Objects measure involved a simple count of the objects touched. The Distance measure was obtained by superimposing a grid of squares over the TV screen, and counting the squares traversed. The Rotation measure involved an apparatus in which the scorer could turn a knob at a constant speed for an amount corresponding to the amount of the subject's head rotation. The length of the line produced by knob-turning constituted the Rotation score.

Only one dimension of exploratory behavior was scored at a time, and whenever the scorer was in doubt, the tape was replayed. Instances that remained doubtful were omitted. A second scorer scored the three measures on 20 subjects for purposes of determining interscorer reliability. Correlations of 1.00, .99, and .88 for Objects, Distance and Rotation, respectively, were obtained. Exploratory behavior scoring was done without knowledge of the questionnaire scores.

Results

Alienation and control variables

Table 1 shows that the intercorrelations of alienation attitudes are, as usual, moderate to high, and that each attitude correlates substantially

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Table 1 goes about here

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with the total score. Table 2 shows that the intercorrelations between alienation attitudes and the control variables are generally small. Alienation attitudes do not appear to be merely reflections of intelligence, extraversion-introversion, neuroticism, age, sex or income as a measure of socioeconomic level. Extraversion-introversion is the only control variable showing more than one significant correlation with alienation attitudes. This suggestion that extraverted persons are not alienated is

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Table 2 goes about here

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not surprising, but indicates the importance of determining the impact of each of these characteristics separately on exploratory behavior.

Alienation and exploratory behavior

All three measures of exploratory behavior intercorrelated positively, so they were standardized and combined to yield a total Exploration score. Each of the original scores correlated highly with this total score.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed, attempting to predict the composite Exploration score. The control variables constituted the first hierarchy, and the Total Alienation score the second hierarchy. The Total Alienation score was used because the somewhat high intercorrelation of alienation attitudes warned of interpretive difficulties due to multicolinearity. The results of this analysis, as shown in Table 3,

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Table 3 goes about here

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indicate that among the control variables, only Extraversion-Introversion is a predictor of Exploration ($F = 4.62$, $p. < .05$). Not surprisingly, extraverted subjects tend to explore more. Total Alienation also emerges as a substantial but negative predictor of Exploration ($F = 4.83$, $p. < .05$). The overall R^2 of .34 is significant ($p. < .05$), and Total Alienation contributes fully half (.17) of it.

In general, then, the more alienated the subject, the less the tendency toward exploratory behavior. Knowing this, it is useful to consider whether particular types of alienation attitude relate to exploration differentially. Although all four types of alienation attitude show a negative correlation with Exploration, only Adventurousness (-.50, $p. < .01$) and Nihilism (-.58, $p. < .01$) are large enough to achieve statistical significance.

Conclusions

The absence of a significant relationship between Powerlessness and Exploration invites comment, as other studies have shown that persons with an

external locus of control fail to obtain information that would be useful to them (e.g., Seeman, 1963; Seeman & Evans, 1962), and in this sense, seem deficient in curiosity. As the correlation between our Powerlessness measure and Rotter's locus of control measure is known to be substantial (Maddi, et al, 1979), the discrepancy between the results of the present and previous studies is probably not merely methodological. It should be noted that locus of control studies have involved situations in which the subject had considerable instrumental reason to need information (e.g., prisoners need information about rules governing parole, and medical patients need information about their conditions). In contrast, obvious instrumentalities tieing the subject to the situation were minimized in the mock waiting period of the present study. Perhaps a sense of powerlessness is least damaging in terms of information gaining when there is nothing of immediate importance to be concerned about.

But adventurousness and nihilism seem to interfere with information gaining even in the "neutral" situation we used. Oriented toward extreme and danterous activities, the highly adventurous person should find it difficult to feel involved or perform in everyday tasks and situations. In this study, subjects might well have experienced the mock waiting period as too tame to be of interest. The highly nihilistic person tends to be critical and rejecting of others and situations when they appear to accept or reflect conventional meaning. Subjects with such attitudes might well have been repelled by the waiting room employed in our study, which appeared to be the well-inhabited office of someone busily engaged in scholarly and research activities.

I have presented this study as an example of research which may help to render psychological alienation cogent by indicating its effects on individual behavior. The inhibiting effect of alienation attitudes is important because exploratory behavior has been regarded as a basic activity whereby humans learn about their environments (e.g., Fowler, 1965). As such, exploration is relevant not only for growth and development but even survival as well. To the extent that they jeopardize exploration, alienation attitudes represent a human handicap.

It has not been my purpose to consider antecedents of alienation attitudes, except to point out that they may not be found in a straightforward analysis of the structural relationship between persons and their social system. Presumably, the antecedents of alienation attitudes are to be found in the more intimate, variable context of schedules of reinforcement occurring in the immediate family or rearing circumstances. It is perhaps worth speculating that from the viewpoint of antecedents, alienation attitudes are a phenomenon of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). A by-product of the approach taken to alienation here may be to bring together the currently disparate work on intrinsic motivation and learned helplessness.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations Among Alienation Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Work	1.00	.55	.49	.42	.60	.63	.72	.74	.58
(2) Social Institutions		1.00	.33	.46	.55	.50	.68	.69	.38
(3) Family			1.00	.46	.49	.66	.64	.59	.53
(4) Other Persons				1.00	.57	.66	.56	.70	.60
(5) Self					1.00	.70	.78	.77	.47
(6) Powerlessness						1.00	.58	.63	.47
(7) Vegetativeness							1.00	.84	.44
(8) Nihilism								1.00	.51
(9) Adventurousness									1.00
Total Alienation	.79	.73	.75	.75	.83	.83	.88	.90	.67

Note: All correlations significant at .05 level or beyond.

Table 2

Correlations Between Alienation and Control Variables

Alienation	I.Q.	Extero-Intero	Neuroti-cism	Age	Sex	Income
Total Alienation	-.19	-.35*	.26	.03	-.10	.21
Work	-.16	-.19	.26	.05	-.01	-.03
Social Institutions	-.35*	-.27	-.14	-.06	-.17	.24
Family	.03	-.34*	.17	.23	.10	.05
Other Persons	-.28	-.21	.33	-.20	-.27	.38*
Self	.01	-.26	.31	.05	-.07	.18
Powerlessness	.01	-.25	.24	.16	-.03	.11
Vegetativeness	-.27	-.36*	.20	-.08	.07	.17
Nihilism	-.15	-.29	.24	-.14	-.19	.24
Adventurousness	-.24	-.21	.38*	.16	-.27	.12

*$p < .05$

Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Control Variables and Alienation on Exploratory Behavior

Variable	Multiple R	R^2	Simple R	Beta	F
Extra-Introversion	0.42	0.17	0.42	0.25	4.62
Neuroticism	0.42	0.17	-0.03	0.17	0.01
I. Q.	0.42	0.17	-0.07	-0.18	0.01
Total Alienation	0.58	0.34	-0.48	-0.48	4.83

Footnotes

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